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THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

VOLUME IX

NOVEMBER, 1903

NUMBER 3

THE SWEAT-SHOP IN SUMMER.¹

THE exploration of fields of industrial labor by those who from circumstances belong outside of the manual laboring class has become so common that one feels constrained to apologize to the long-suffering public for thrusting upon it still another "experience." The only excuse for this, as for many another, is the hope that it may rouse to thought and action some people who have heretofore been apathetic or listless, and this time in regard to a vigorous relic of an earlier industrial system—the sweat-shop.

From the time of Paul Göhre² and Frau Dr. Minna Wettstein-Adelt³ to Walter Wycoff,⁴ many educated people have been actively interested in the hardships of some phases of industry, and from time to time have thrown light upon actual conditions by experiencing the toil. Others again, in a dilettante fashion, have gone down and mixed with the so-called dregs of society long enough to focus a figurative kodak on little groups of workers here and there, for the purpose of ekeing out "copy." To the serious student of society such work is valueless, to the general reader it may have a morbid sort of interest, and to the toiler it is an insult; whereas an honest portrayal of the conditions under which the people work may be of inestimable value

¹ Photographs of Chicago sweaters furnished by courtesy of the Chicago *American*.

² *Three Months in a Workshop* (1895).

³ $3\frac{1}{2}$ *Monate Fabrik-Arbeiterin* (1897). ⁴ *The Workers* (1898).

to all. To the student, the philanthropist, and the legislator it suggests a rational ground for constructive action; to the general public it may serve to awaken a sense of personal responsibility; while to the toiler himself it may mean hope in the future.

It is inevitable that the mighty changes constantly taking place in modern industry should push to oppression some who can but poorly stand the strain. The responsibility is not theirs; circumstances and the consumer are to blame. Then let us, as consumers, accept the dictum of fate and conduct ourselves accordingly. Duty may lead me to endure the hardships of the worker in the interests of amelioration; she just as surely leads others to assist in lifting the burden when once it has been pointed out.

The field of investigation included in my present task is difficult of delimitation, owing to the widely differing conceptions in men's minds; but in this study I use the term "sweat-shop" as synonymous with "tenement-house workshop," the same in which it is used by factory inspectors in their reports. The term itself appeared in England during the troublous times of 1847-48, when the working people were in the direst straits and commenced taking work home for a mere pittance rather than sit quietly awaiting starvation. "In England and America alike the sweater is simply a sub-contractor who, at home or in small workshops, undertakes to do work which he in turn sublets to other contractors, or has done under his own eyes."¹ An inquiry into the sweating system conducted by a committee of the House of Lords in 1888-90 defined sweating as "no particular method of remuneration, no particular form of industrial organization, but certain conditions of employment, viz., unusually low rates of wages, excessive hours of labor, and unsanitary work-places."

The work of which I am to speak was undertaken in all seriousness with the hope that it might throw some light upon the evolution of the ready-made clothing industry, and thus incidentally aid the Consumers' League in its crusade against sweated garments, and in this way to awaken in the minds of buyers an appreciation of the danger lurking near them, when they unthink-

¹ HELEN CAMPBELL, *Prisoners of Poverty Abroad*, p. 34.

ingly purchase goods made under unsanitary, not to say demoralizing, conditions. The average person, it must be admitted, knows little or nothing of the conditions and processes of garment-making. He knows equally little of the manufacture of the butter and the production of the milk he buys; but his ignorance does not save him from inoculation with fever germs, neither does it excuse him when he communicates disease to others by lack of precaution. City authorities hold him responsible in the observance of quarantine regulations; and so in this case ignorance of the conditions should be no excuse.

It may appear to some that the summer is not an auspicious season for sweat-shop study. It is true that it is a slack time; yet work is being done, and under more trying conditions, in many respects, than in the cold-weather period. First of all, the slackness of the work renders life more precarious, and thus the sweater is tempted to use the services of all members of his family. Children are home from school, and they must justify their existence some way; or, as one man said to me: "What are our children for, if not to help support us?" I must confess that this was to me a rather new view of family obligation. The duty, I should think, is on the side of the parents, who alone are responsible for the existence of their offspring. One feels this keenly when he sees slum streets swarming with small bits of humanity, festering in the summer sultriness. It is all very well to talk of man's duty to the state in reproducing himself. The chief trouble with the poor in the great cities is that they reproduce themselves too many times. Seven or eight little children in a home where there is only enough bread for two is a monstrous outrage against the innocent victims, and it should be condemned by enlightened sentiment everywhere.

But it is not my intention to offer a panacea for such a lamentable social condition, but only to call attention to an existing horror which fosters the survival of an industrial anachronism—the tenement-house workshop. To the ignorant, harassed parent sewing at home the temptation to utilize childish activity is great. I have no quarrel with those who decry the modern tendency to "race-suicide;" they are sincere, and their

protest, no doubt, is necessary in some quarters; but to one who has spent more or less time during the summer season in the slums of London, New York, and Chicago the crying need of "race-limitation" must be apparent. The high rate of infant mortality saves the slums. This opinion may savor of brutishness, but it is born of common-sense. Once I saw a little baby die in a small room in a rear tenement, where the mother, her sister, and two older children were finishing Ascot ties at two and a half cents a dozen, and the mercury stood at ninety-six degrees. The mother had the baby on her lap, and she was working half an hour before its little life ebbed out. She screamed with grief for a few minutes, and then she said: "Thank God it's gone! I couldn't take care of it." In a few months there was another, and the struggle still goes on. All sweaters, however, are not in such dire straits as these, but they are working under the worst possible conditions.

My interest in this particular phase of industry was first actively aroused during the summer of 1900, when I visited some fifty or sixty sweat-shops in New York for the Tenement House Commission.¹ My work was insignificant compared with that of others, but full of significance to me in that it revealed a hitherto undreamed of condition of toil for thousands of unskilled workers. My official visits were to the necktie workers entirely, and each morning before starting out I carefully scanned the board of health reports so that I might avoid the neighborhood of contagious diseases; but, in spite of my vigilance, on more than one occasion I found measles and scarlet-fever patients in or very near the domestic workshop; yet the sewing went on as usual. Now, someone bought those neckties bearing the germs of disease, and so an innocent victim of the greed for gain may have paid the penalty.

But all of this is not pleasant to think upon. Factory inspectors' reports have told the tale of the spread of loathsome diseases by means of garments made in the home workshop, and notable among these is the special report on smallpox by Mrs. Florence Kelley, of Illinois, in 1894. But a very small

¹ Acting under appointment of Governor Roosevelt.

proportion of the people who buy ready-made clothing read state reports; and so they go blindly on, encouraging the perpetuation of a system wretched in the extreme—a system which, in spite of the law, utilizes the service of children and invalids.

My insight into the neckwear industry led me to explore unofficially another phase of sweating, known as the “knee pants,” or, more correctly, the garment-workers’ trade. One who lives for a time on the lower East Side of New York is bound to be impressed by the continual morning and evening procession of people bearing on their heads and shoulders great bundles of these unfinished garments. I used to wonder if the making of knee “pants” was the staple industry of the country. I suppose the small boy’s ability to transform whole cloth into rags in the twinkling of an eye is at the root of this great industry, with its concomitant hardships; but as, in the old tales, the blacksmith’s horse went unshod, so the children of the people who wear their lives out making “pants” rarely had more than an apology for such a garment to cover their nakedness.

At last I determined to see for myself just the conditions under which these garments were made, and so learn by experience how lucrative it proved. I went some blocks away from my abiding place to a region where I was not known, to seek work as a sweater. Many weary blocks I walked in the scorching sun, and many weary stairs I climbed in what proved to be a fruitless effort to find employment. No one wanted me, because the season was dull and there was not enough work to warrant the hiring of a “green” hand. In piece-work the race certainly is to the swift and skilled. Thus I was obliged to retire from the field to swell the ranks of the unemployed. But my plan to work as a sweater was not abandoned, only postponed.

My next attempt to get employment was in Chicago, several years later, where my efforts were crowned with success, and this in the hard heat of the city summer.

One day I went down to the region where many sweat-shops flourish. The street I selected first was near the river—narrow, dirty, ill-smelling, with treacherous board walks at the sides, and walled in by rickety houses, reeking with stale smells; and

through that street I walked seeking employment. I may mention incidentally that I covered my more than usually shabby clothes with a long coat, which I deposited in a pawn-shop before seeking work. Sweat-shops were everywhere. I groped my way to the third or fourth floor of many a house, asking if they needed a "hand," and as many times I was turned away,



SCENE IN SWEAT-SHOP.

and mostly with a savage look or word. One man said, with brutal frankness, and in broken English, that I was holding my head too high, and that he did not want my kind about. I retreated, communed with myself a little, and gave myself a few lessons in humility of spirit and practiced a hang-dog position of the head. Another was skeptical because my fingers were not needle-pricked, while still another objected to me on the ground that I was an American and likely to be lazy! That seemed highly amusing. Is the native-born worker really discriminated against in his own country? I found that these foreign sweaters—and there are more than three thousand in

Chicago—favored foreign employees, and I was unable to determine whether the reason was due to jealousy or fear.

At last I found work in a rear tenement on the second floor, where eight men and two women were engaged in making knee pants. A third woman who worked there was ill that day, and the owner told me I might take her place, my wages to depend on the amount of work I did. I eagerly took up my task, which was sewing the pockets for boys' pants. It was machine-work entirely. I was told to take a seat at a big foot-power machine and go to work on a stack of pockets a yard high. After a few brief instructions I was able to run the machine; but I fear I was rather slow, for I was barely able to keep a man who sat at a machine next to me, putting on the facings, employed; and he had an enormous pile to start with. Fortunately, he had some basting to do, and that helped me a little. After an hour or two I became more of an expert, and turned off a constant stream of pockets. And just here I wish to enter a protest against putting pockets in the trousers of small boys. It is not necessary, and they are so hard to make. If anyone imagines it is an easy thing to work a sewing machine all day, let him try it for awhile. Abounding health and strength kept me from being prostrated at the end of my first day; a weaker woman unused to toil could not have endured the strain. It is said that strong men who have worked foot-power machines from youth are worn out at thirty-five, oftentimes wholly or partially paralyzed from hips down. It is a gloomy outlook, indeed, for the worker, who realizes that he will be a disabled old man while still young in years. In the modern factory foot-power has virtually passed away and electricity has been substituted. There one may stitch all day, using the foot only when it is necessary to push a button to start or stop the machine.

I cannot now describe the utter weariness that possessed me when my first day's work was over. I sewed from nine in the morning to six in the evening, with a brief halt for lunch; the others were at work much earlier. I know, of course, that the newness of the task made it doubly hard for me. My companions were not so tired as I.

But let us pass over the physical feeling and look at my surroundings. As was stated before, we were in a rear tenement, which was reached through an alley paved with tin cans and broken bottles, and the outside stairway leading to the house was rickety beyond belief. Each step groaned and trembled as I crept carefully up to the door, where I had to stoop a little to enter a small room lighted by one window. In this room were six people and five machines, the sixth man being a presser. Opening off the first room was a second, smaller and darker, where the head of the establishment and two others worked. The whole place was filthy, and was rendered even more unpleasant by unsavory odors from the living-rooms adjoining, where the enterprising wife boarded the workers. The presser was an unsightly object, clad in one brace and a pair of trousers, and he literally boiled over his work. The perspiration dropped continually from his short brown beard to the steaming clothes he was ironing. The irons were heated on an ill-smelling oil stove, and all of this made the room horribly unpleasant. But these things made no difference to the men and women, whose whole beings were absorbed in the various processes of making knee pants, for each was paid according to the number of pieces he turned off.*

The sweaters are not unionized, and so there is no minimum wage. The state factory law theoretically regulates the number of hours in a working day. I say theoretically, because in actual practice the sweater and his family work as many hours as they see fit. I found in New York women, and even children under the legal age, working till nearly midnight in the busy season. Very young children can be utilized advantageously, pulling out basting threads. Their small fingers do the work well enough, and much time is saved to the adult members of the family. This is appalling to those of us whose childhood's memories carry only long days of delightful play out of doors with a twilight-hour bedtime. And this is what belongs to every child in the state; and cursed, I say, be the industrial system that defrauds the children of this God-given right!

* An exception was extra help hired and paid by the day.

One of the saddest sights I ever saw was a group of three little girls under ten years of age sitting on a tenement-room floor pulling bastings out of neckties the mother and aunt were finishing. The little things were piling up the threads and pretending they were balls which they would play with when the night's toil was over. But the little tired eyes grew sleepy long before they were free to play as they had planned.

My employer had two children who worked in the shop during the daytime, and I have every reason to believe that they performed some services after we had gone home.¹

The second morning I was at my place at seven o'clock, a worn and weary creature, to face the hardships of the day, but glad to be allowed to return. I was told that my work was not of a high order, but as I was swifter than many beginners I was regarded as hopeful. Two days' work making pockets quite reconciled me to belong to the pocketless sex.



GIRLS OF FOURTEEN AND FIFTEEN YEARS.

¹ Illinois child-labor law in force after July 1, 1903: "*Section 1. Child under fourteen years.*—Be it enacted by the people of the state of Illinois, represented in the general assembly: That no child under the age of fourteen years shall be employed, permitted or suffered to work at any gainful occupation in any theater, concert hall, or place of amusement where intoxicating liquors are sold, or in any mercantile institution, store, office, hotel, laundry, manufacturing establishment, bowling alley, passenger or freight elevator, factory or workshop, or as messenger or driver therefor, within this state. That no child under fourteen years of age shall be employed at any work performed for wages or other compensation, to whomsoever payable, during any portion of any month when the public schools of the town, township, or village or city in which he or she resides are in session, nor be employed at any work before the hour of seven o'clock in the morning or after the hour of six o'clock in the evening. *Provided*, that no child shall be allowed to work more than eight hours in any one day."

The two women who were my companions were stolid German Jews with expressionless faces. They were both married and had several children at home. During the lunch hour of the second day I asked them if they were very tired, and they both agreed that they would rather die than go on much longer at that work; their backs ached incessantly from constant running of the machines. I asked why they did not try factory life. One said that the near-by factories could not take non-union people, and she could not join a union for two reasons: first, her husband would not allow her, because he had been nearly killed in a strike riot once when he was a "scab" worker; and, second, she did not know the trade well enough. The other woman said that one had no independence in a factory, which, being interpreted, really meant that she did not care to be a very little cog in a very big wheel. She thought she was the wheel in Herr G.'s establishment; and I learned later that her thoughts were quite correct, for the rest were afraid of her, and when she told the presser to take his unsightly form into the next room and out of the presence of the "new lady," he sheepishly slunk away. This was at lunch time, when we were trying to eat the scraps the manager's wife had brought us. I could not bring myself to the point of eating. My honest conviction is that I would have elected starvation first, but fortunately I was not called upon to make the choice. My appetite was gone. The food may have been wholesome enough, but, to put it mildly, it was not attractive.

At the close of my second day I was told that the woman for whom I was substituting would return on the morrow, and so my services would not be required. This news came as a relief, for my whole soul hated the big machine I had to work all day. I felt as if I were in bondage and shuddered at the thought of the treadmill existence.

I learned but little from the workers. The men were non-committal, even suspicious of the stranger. The women were weary and unresponsive, and we were together only two days. But I saw much. I saw a group of human beings working under conditions not fit for human beings; I saw boys' pants made in filth too odious to describe; and I saw the mere pittance handed

to me for two days' toil. I learned that those garments when finished were sent to dealers all over the state, and were sold so cheap that even country mothers bought them for their children. Good people are amazed that clothes can be sold at such low



THREE YOUTHFUL SWEATERS.

prices, and well they may wonder. They should stand aghast at the conditions that made them cheap. Knee pants are finished for from fifty cents to a dollar and a quarter per dozen pairs, or an average of six or seven cents a pair.

No reasonable person condemns the legitimate cheapening of clothing, but it is the demand for cheapness at all hazards that should be subject to condemnation; and we must not lose sight

of the fact that the cheapening of ready-made garments has brought relief to many an overburdened mother whose days are all too short to give time for the family sewing.

My experience in the shop of Herr G. forced upon me the conclusion that no money would induce me to buy knee pants without finding out first of all, if possible, where they were made. It is the duty of the consumer to acquaint himself with the conditions of production. And we who buy need not soothe our consciences with the belief that we are helpless in the matter, while the people who give out the work are the only sinners. This may be comfortable, but it is criminal. The contractor gives us what we are willing to take. Sufficient protest from us will induce him to change his method, if it be objectionable.

My second employer was a frail-looking woman with a Polish name. She and her daughter were working on women's cotton wrappers. When I appeared asking for work, they were skeptical about needing help, but finally told me I could stay, and if I proved useful they would give me fifty cents a day. I evidently lived up to their expectation, for they kept me four days, when they dismissed me. We commenced to work about eight in the morning, and worked steadily until about half-past six, with a few minutes for lunch. I carried a lunch with me and ate it alone in the bedroom where we sewed; the others ate in the little kitchen, the only remaining room in the tenement flat. I found that the daughter slept in the kitchen, while the father and mother occupied the bedroom. The father was an unskilled laborer and worked at odd jobs. Thus the living- and sleeping- and workrooms were one—a distinct violation of the state factory and workshops act.

This condition exists in places too numerous to mention, and the fact that it does exist casts no odium on the factory inspectors, who are conscientious and efficient, but in numbers wholly inadequate to cope with the situation. There are but nineteen for Illinois, while New York has fifty, Massachusetts thirty, and Pennsylvania twenty-six. It takes eight deputies three months to inspect the sweat-shops in Chicago once. It is clear that an annual inspection is insufficient. The inspectors visit the

tenement-house workshop in the autumn—the busy season, which lasts from September to December. During the remainder of the year the sweaters do as they please. When one remembers that nineteen people inspect upward of twenty thousand establishments, employing about half a million people during the year, the herculean task of the inspectors becomes evident. There are in Chicago alone nearly six thousand¹ garment-makers' shops, employing twenty-five thousand women and two thousand or more girls under sixteen years of age, besides twenty-one thousand men and five hundred little boys.

For graphic statement the following tabulation is adopted as a recapitulation of the foregoing facts :

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---------|
| Factory inspectors in Illinois | - | - | - | - | 19 |
| Annual inspections | - | - | - | - | 17,219 |
| Total employees | - | - | - | - | 484,172 |

GARMENT WORKERS (CHICAGO).

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| Establishments | - | - | - | - | - | 5,313 |
| Total employees | - | - | - | - | - | 50,417 |
| Women | - | - | - | - | - | 25,573 |
| Girls under sixteen years of age | - | - | - | - | - | 2,417 |
| Men | - | - | - | - | - | 21,759 |
| Boys under sixteen years of age | - | - | - | - | - | 569 |

And this is the great army whose life and conditions of work interested me, and should interest everyone who buys clothing. One cannot quiet his conscience by announcing that he goes to high-priced clothiers for his garments, and so cannot come in contact with sweated goods; hence he is free from responsibility in the matter. Such soothing syrup may prove fatal in the end. In the first place, the mere fact of buying expensive clothing does not exempt one from the danger of tenement-house goods. The tailor who charges fancy prices is quite liable to let his work out by contract, and the original contractor, though not a sweater himself, may sublet the work to one who is; and so one's hundred-dollar coat may repose on the bed of a scarlet-fever patient before it is delivered ready for use. Costliness alone is no guarantee that a garment is made under decent conditions.

¹ Round numbers only are used here.

On the other hand, even though we are certain that our clothes are made in a wholesome place by workers who receive fair wages, our responsibility to society does not end. The fact that any garments at all are manufactured and sold with the germs of disease and the life-blood of the workers upon them



SWEAT-SHOP COAT CARRIERS.

should be sufficient incentive to all people to demand that the horror cease.

"What can we do?" some may ask. The answer is clear: Insist upon a guarantee on every article of clothing you buy. Dealers are only too eager to satisfy their patrons. If we accept without question what they offer, why should they change? Their only desire is to suit their customers—the consumers.

The tenement-house workshop should be exterminated, and there is but one sure way of driving it out of existence; that is, by united action on the part of those who buy clothes. There is an organization whose primary aim is the rousing to action of lethargic persons who disregard social and moral responsibility, and in addition to this the Consumers' League aims to endorse only clothes made under wholesome conditions. The Consumers' League label has become quite a potent factor in the mercantile world, and it bids fair to become even more powerful as the organization enlists more and more of the intelligent sympathy of the community. It may be noted here that the Women's Union Label League stands for the same principle, but its indorsement is a trades-union label. This is creating a public conscience in a class but little affected by Consumers' League logic, and so is doing an excellent work for society.

Another employer of mine was a red-bearded Jew who made shirt waists. He had three women and one young boy working for him, and agreed to take me at sixty cents a day. I went to work immediately finishing cuffs. The waists I worked on came from an ultra-fashionable shirtmaker—a woman—who charges eight dollars for the mere making of a garment. I learned her identity from the boy who carried the parcels back and forth. A few days later I called on that woman and inquired her prices. She quoted them as I have stated. I then asked her if the waists were made in her own shop. With a bewitching little smile she answered: "Oh yes, we make everything right in the back rooms. That is why I charge good prices and take only a limited amount of work from select people!" I told her I thought I would not leave an order then, and passed out, not caring to belong to the "select." She added the insult of a lie to the injury of sweated waists. Her waists were carefully cut and fitted, but were just as poorly made as much cheaper ready-to-wear ones.

A sojourn among the garment workers certainly reveals some strange facts about the making of fashionable clothing. Now I never see certain more or less fashionable establishments without thinking at the same time of certain tenement attics bound to them by an invisible tie. My lady who scatters smiles through slumdom little dreams that the stylish clothes she wears may have been partly made beyond the ill-smelling alley she will not enter. It may be her first visit there but her clothes should feel at home!

Work in the shop of the red-bearded Jew was hard for me, because the days were insufferably warm, and the light was poor, as the workroom was on a court. I got along rather slowly, and I had a feeling that possibly I was not worth more than sixty cents a day. But my pride suffered a frightful shock when my employer told me that I was not worth anything, and he did not propose to pay me at all. This decision was precipitated upon me at the end of the second day, when I asked for my wages, as I did not intend to return.

I learned but little from my companions there. The women

were up in years and uncommunicative. One of them had an ugly sore on her hand which she tried to keep covered. I would not "finish" for her, and so incurred her dislike. I said nothing, but always took work from someone else in preference.

Another place, where I worked but half a day, was more interesting to me because a number of young girls were there and they kept the place lively all the time. I asked one of them if she supposed we could get work in a factory, and she said: "Law, yes, if yer wants to join the union!" As for herself, she claimed that anything was better than "livin' by rule." The others declared that she was not skilled enough to belong to a union, and they grew quite merry in the dispute, so I could not determine just what her real objection to the factory was. These were the first happy sweaters I found. The six girls chewed gum, and laughed while they sewed. They ran the machines in a care-free way that almost made my hair stand on end. I got fifteen cents for my half-day's work. I was not needed longer, so I had to



A YOUNG TOILER.

seek other scenes of labor.

I did not want long engagements in the sweat-shops. They were not necessary for my purpose. I simply wished to verify my knowledge regarding actual conditions of work. I had visited over a hundred of these places, and I already knew the aspect they present to the observer; but a few minutes' visit can never teach one the hardships of the workers. We may gasp when we are told of women who toil twelve or fourteen hours for a mere pittance, but, after all, it is without meaning until one has experienced the weary eyes and dizzy head and aching back

caused by a long day's sewing in a badly ventilated and poorly lighted room. My poor cramped shoulders made me understand the feelings of the woman who sang the "Song of the Shirt;" and only too many of our present-day toilers know what it means to "stitch, stitch, stitch, in poverty, hunger, and dirt." And who makes them do it? We do. Our mad craze for cheapness has cheapened life.

But the tenement-house workshop must go; and the Christianized consumer must make it go.

Still another employer was a woman engaged in making corset covers. I toiled part of a day and received thirty-five cents for my time. It was hand-work entirely—the kind that appears on expensive *lingerie*. The sewing itself was rather pleasant, as the materials and lace were soft and fine; but before the day was over my inexperienced fingers were pricked past recognition. The others, accustomed to needlework, did themselves no such bodily violence.

The workroom was clean and bright and cheery, and looked out on the street from the fifth floor of a rather poor tenement. Our employer was a sharp-featured American spinster, whose contact with the industrial world had not softened her as she advanced in years. She appeared to have two missions on earth—one, the making of underwear; the other, inveighing against matrimony; and she threw herself with equal zeal into each. I believe she made a good living from her sewing. She took work from a fashionable trousseau-maker and employed as many helpers as she needed from time to time. Her method was to engage girls for a week and then discharge them at night if she wished. Her reason, of course, for agreeing to give a week's work was that few would consider a proposition for one day only. I did, it is true, but a self-supporting sewing-woman would hesitate to stop for such an engagement. Our employer told me that she usually paid fifty cents a day to a smart seamstress, but, as I stated before, she gave me only thirty-five cents, claiming that I did not work a full day. I actually sewed nine and one-half hours, while the five regulars sewed twelve hours. The granite spinster believed in grinding the soul of her

employees. Her philosophy of life was that women are too idle and too prone to sentiment. The first evil trait she seeks to eradicate from all who become a part of her industrial machine; while she harangues on the second whenever her mouth is free from pins and buttons. "Beware of men!" is the slogan that makes the needles glitter through the muslin and lace. She even gives free lectures after hours on this important subject, and yet she is unwilling to pay her women wages that would render them financially independent of men. I was not with her long enough to learn her justification of such inconsistency.

Hasty marriage is usually the working-girl's last protest against a wage-earning system that pushes her to the wall. It is not a hope of bettering her condition so much as a desire to escape immediate wretchedness that leads her to plunge into what often proves the infernal fire of matrimony. Thus the supposedly ideal state frequently turns into purgatory, from which the divorce court or death offers the only means of escape. Some such thoughts as these were evidently surging through the mind of my employer, who mingled muslin with matrimonial misery in her lamentations and warnings. She was a unique type of sweater.

Such garments as we made there sell at five dollars apiece, and my inexperienced hands finished one that day. I could buy the materials at retail for seventy-five cents in any good store, so there was a profit of nearly four dollars on one after paying for my work, and this on the false assumption that the goods were bought at retail. The fashionable modiste took orders from her stylish customers for hand-made underwear "almost at cost," for the sake of accommodating them, and then sent the work out to a sweater who lived in an unhealthful quarter of the city. It may be as well that we are not omniscient! Still there was not the serious question of filth in that establishment that frequently faces one in a tenement-house workshop. But the equally serious one of long hours with insufficient wages was there demanding an answer from the conscientious buyer. And this, after all, is the vital issue.

Unwholesome physical conditions may cause loss of life, but

the other stunts the mental, moral, and spiritual growth of all those engaged in the fight for bread. When prosperity is flaunting itself before the people's gaze, it seems incongruous that thousands upon thousands of citizens, nominally free, are in the thralldom of slavery more harassing than that banished forever by the Civil War. The black slaves were sure of food and shelter, while the white industrial slaves lead a most precarious existence. It is not pleasant to live with famine staring one in the face, and, in spite of the ingenious schemes for living on five cents a day originated by people with satisfied appetites and warm rooms, it is a serious matter for a woman alone in the city to try to live on two or three dollars a week. Such unfortunates who earn this pittance in the sweat-shop usually give up the struggle to maintain a decent appearance, and go about with the slouching gait and dull-eyed discontent that indicate a hopeless heart. The joy of service is unknown to them, and one cannot wonder. It is a simple thing to grow enthusiastic over the zealous delight that should be in the soul of the one who works with his hands, but the actual emotion is a dread travesty on the idealist's dream. Joyful thoughts are a mockery when one sews all day long in a dismal, unsanitary room and is only half fed. The sweater is fathoms below the factory operator in all that goes to make life more than mere physical existence.

I observed much while I toiled among the sweaters. It was no light task for one unaccustomed to machine- and hand-sewing to sit for hours and stitch, stitch, stitch, with every nerve tense in the effort to accomplish as much as possible ; it was no childish prank to endure the aching bones and dizzy head and weary eyes that are a part of such work. But I have purposely ignored much of this for two reasons. In the first place, I claim no heroism in enduring hardships, because they were self-imposed and for a purpose ; and, in the second place, it would be necessary to charge much of my discomfort to inexperience. Any unusual physical strain brings with it undue weariness. So, while there is no significance attaching to my fatigue, it should be of keenest moment that there are thousands of women victims of a system vocal with the sobbing of children and the groans of

weary women, the adequacy of whose compensation bears no fitting relation to the labor contributed to society. Such a condition is fatal to progress in its widest sense.

This may apply with equal truth to other branches of industry, but that does not weaken its potency as an argument for



GIRL FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE WHO RUNS A MACHINE ALL DAY.

change in this particular occupation. Sweated goods are a constant menace to society, both in the injury done to the workers owing to the bad conditions under which they work, and in the liability from exposure to contagious diseases; and popular opinion should support this verdict. Theoretically this is indorsed by all intelligent people, but an indorsement to be of any avail must be capable of practical demonstration. In this case it must mean an

utter rejection of garments thus made, and this implies insistence upon a label assuring the buyer that the article in question either was or was not made in a sweat-shop. In either case he could make his own choice.

As each buyer cannot become a volunteer inspector, the most rational method of attaining his end is to unite his protest to an organized one and thus increase its potency. The Consumers' League¹ is a rational and effective crusade in favor of goods made under wholesome conditions, and its guarantee carries weight. It seems therefore a simple thing for the purchaser of ready-made clothing to aid in the effort to crystallize public opinion

¹ National headquarters in New York city.

into definite action along the lines suggested by this organization; and those who are not informed would do well to acquaint themselves with its principles. It stands for fair treatment of employees in mercantile establishments; it stands for sanitary workshops; and it stands for an attempt to place responsibility where it belongs. It indorses those merchants whose standards are high.

I believe the sweat-shop evil could be eradicated if thinking people would lend their aid. The trades-organizations are working to this end; and when all these forces become sufficiently emphatic in their denunciation of this deplorable system, it will vanish away, as negro slavery vanished from the civilized world.

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CHICAGO.